



State Capitol | Lansing, Michigan 48913  
PH (517) 373.3543 | FAX (517) 373.0927  
[www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/hammerstrom/](http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/hammerstrom/)



State Capitol | Lansing, Michigan 48913  
PH (517) 373.7946 | FAX (517) 373.2678  
[www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/stamas/](http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/stamas/)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Amy Zaagman  
1-888-477-8238

## Joint Committee Receives Information About State's Mental Health System *Senate Health Policy and DCH Appropriations Subcommittee Gather Input*

**September 18, 2003** - Yesterday afternoon, the Senate Health Policy Committee and Department of Community Health Appropriations Subcommittee held the first of a series of joint hearings designed to gather input and hear recommendations on how the Legislature can work to improve mental health services delivery in Michigan.

The committee first heard comments from Patrick Barrie, Director of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at the Department of Community Health on the history and status of mental health services in Michigan. His comments were followed by a lengthy exchange of questions and answers with committee members.

"I thoroughly appreciate Mr. Barrie's candor with the joint committee," said Sen. Bev Hammerstrom (R-Temperance), chair of the Senate Health Policy Committee. "We all know that our system is not perfect and needs improvement. Mr. Barrie offered us some realistic ways to assist in those efforts while carefully laying out the limitations created by funding issues as well as burdensome federal and state regulations."

The committee welcomed Dr. Michael Engel, current President of the Michigan Psychiatric Society. Offering the committee helpful citations from recent reports of the U.S. Surgeon General as well as the President's New Freedom Commission, Dr. Engel implored the committee to fully examine the way this state cares for those with afflictions of the brain.

"Our Community Mental Health System is at a crossroads. Our programs have grown and developed from a historical base that no longer fits with modern understanding and practice in psychiatric care," said Dr. Engel.

"We heard some excellent testimony yesterday which provides us with a framework to craft legislation that will improve the lives of individuals and families dealing with mental illness in our state," commented Senator Tony Stamas, (R-Midland), the Senate DCH Appropriations Subcommittee chair.

(More)

Mark Reinstein, President of the Mental Health Association in Michigan, highlighted the National Mental Health Association report from earlier this year and brought several issues to the attention of the committee, including access to modern mental health medications and grievance procedures for all individuals receiving services.

“We have created a recipe for chaos and crisis, and these are precisely what we have in Michigan regarding access to and delivery of mental illness services,” said Mr. Reinstein. “Please help us start the process of recovery from the dire circumstances we’re confronting.”

Both Mr. Reinstein and Dr. Judith Kovach, representing the Michigan Psychological Association, directed the committee back to the issue of mental health parity. Both stated that the lack of adequate mental health coverage in most health insurance policies drives people into the public system adding to the strain of the system, or they go without care at all. The Health Policy Committee held five hearings in the spring on the issue of mental health parity and is currently working to resolve issues with the necessary legislation, Senate Bills 4 and 5.

While the majority of this week’s hearing was dominated by planned speakers, the next hearing scheduled for Wednesday, September 24<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m. is expected to include greater time for public testimony. The hearing will be held in the Senate Hearing Room in the Boji Tower, 124 W. Allegan in Lansing.